CHAPTER XIV

GOVERNMENT

INTRODUCTORY

ONE of the most noteworthy achievements of the Chinese has been in the realm of government. Here they have been among the most successful of all the peoples of the globe. To those who know only the China of to-day, with its prolonged political weakness and near approach to chaos, this may seem a strange and unwarranted assertion. Yet it can easily be justified. Judged by the area and the number of people which it controlled, the length of time it endured, and its record in promoting the unity of an empire and maintaining order and insuring justice, the governmental structure which disappeared in the twentieth century compares favorably with that of any other ever devised by man.

Under such dynasties as the Han, the T'ang, and the Ch'ing the area governed by the Chinese through their political machinery has been surpassed only by such empires as the Mongol (which, though ephemeral, was huge), the British, and the Russian, and, possibly, the Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman, the Arab, the Spanish, and the Portuguese. Even under such dynasties as the Sung and the Ming, China was larger than Western Europe. With the exception of the British Empire, the population held together by China's political structure at the beginning of the twentieth century was greater than that ever under one government.

The Chinese state which has been so revolutionized in the past generation has had a longer duration than any other of which we know. Its roots go back into the Chou dynasty. Its essential outlines, as it was to be seen at the close of the nineteenth century, took form in the Ch'ien Han, in the second century B.C.

This government of China was by no means faultless. In